

VZCZCXRO2908  
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR  
DE RUEHDIR #0018/01 3461616  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P R 121616Z DEC 06  
FM IRAN RPO DUBAI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0030  
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE  
RUEHDIR/IRAN RPO DUBAI 0023  
RHEFDHP/DIA DHP-1 WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0033  
RUEHAD/USDAO ABU DHABI TC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 IRAN RPO DUBAI 000018

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR GAYLE; BAKU FOR HAUGEN  
BERLIN FOR PAETZOLD; PARIS FOR WALLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/12/2016

TAGS: [IR](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVE RIVALRIES AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN IRAN

REF: RPO DUBAI 0008

CLASSIFIED BY: Jillian Burns, Director, Iran Regional Presence  
Office, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(C) Summary: Nationwide elections for municipal councils in Iran will be held December 15, along with the Assembly of Experts elections. The elections are being held concurrently to save costs and to increase voter turnout, which is nonetheless expected to be low. The municipal councils have little institutional power, but they select the mayor of the municipality, which can be an influential activity, particularly in Tehran. President Ahmadinejad was not nationally known when the municipal council named him as mayor of Tehran in 2003. Reformists were largely disqualified from the municipal council elections across the country, with the notable exception of Tehran where they remain competitive. Reform groups have created a single electoral list for Tehran, while various conservative groups remain divided across several lists. A rivalry between President Ahmadinejad and Tehran Mayor (and 2005 presidential candidate) Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf is playing out in the Tehran municipal elections. The results nation-wide, depending on the degree of tampering, may give a clearer view of the political strength of various conservatives and be a rough reflection of Ahmadinejad's popularity. In Tehran, the results may also indicate if reformers' efforts to work cooperatively pay dividends. End summary.

2.(C) Despite being mandated in the constitution, municipal councils were only established in 1999 by President Khatami to stimulate grass-roots political participation. The second municipal elections were held in 2003, and a public disappointed by reformist failures elected mostly conservatives. The December 15 elections will be the country's third for municipal councils. The municipal councils have little institutional power in themselves. The central government retains control of most public services, such as provision of water and electricity. However, it is the responsibility of the councils to select the mayor, which can be an influential activity, particularly in Tehran.

3.(C) The mayor of Tehran is an increasingly important political position, which makes the election of the body that selects the mayor more significant. The incumbent, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, is a well-connected conservative, former IRGC and a former commander of the Law Enforcement Forces (the national police). Qalibaf competed against Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential election and was picked by some analysts to be the winner. It is rumored that Supreme Leader Khamenei arranged for Qalibaf to

become the mayor of Tehran following his defeat. Qalibaf has an adversarial relationship with President Ahmadinejad, who was his predecessor as mayor. The Tehran municipal council selected the relatively unknown Ahmadinejad to be mayor in 2003. The rivalry between the president and Qalibaf is being played out in Tehran's municipal council elections, with supporters of Ahmadinejad and groups backing Qalibaf creating competing electoral lists. By contrast, 18 reformist groups have reportedly managed to consolidate their efforts and have created a single electoral list, which may increase their chance of success against a split conservative vote.

4.(C) Reformists remain on the ballot in the Tehran elections but were largely disqualified throughout the rest of the country. Candidates were vetted by parliamentary elections committees, comprised of members of the conservative-dominated legislature. Iranian press reported that four reformist candidates in the northern city of Rasht were disqualified after the elections campaign had begun, meaning they had previously been approved but were disqualified on further consideration. Some observers speculate that reformers in Tehran were spared the heavy vetting in order to distract attention from large-scale reformist disqualifications throughout the rest of the country.

5.(C) Voter participation in the municipal elections is predicted to be relatively low, since the turnout in the last elections in 2003 was disappointing. Differing statistics were reported, but most place voter turnout in 2003 at around 30% of eligible voters, nearly half the participation levels of the first municipal council elections in 1999. The municipal elections and the Assembly of Experts elections are combined for the first time, in part for cost savings, and in part out of hope that the more popular municipal elections will boost turn-out for the Assembly of Experts elections.

RPO DUBAI 00000018 002 OF 002

6.(C) Comment: The municipal elections and the Assembly of Experts elections are significantly less important to the immediate political direction of Iran than the presidential or Majles elections (which the Majles is debating holding concurrently). They do, however, provide a window into political dynamics in Iran. The election campaigns serve to illustrate political alliances -- and ever-growing divisions --among conservatives. In the case of Tehran municipal elections, it also shows some success among reform groups in regrouping following their loss of the legislature in 2004 and the presidency in 2005. This should not be read as an indication of swiftly approaching change, but bears noting with an eye toward the 2008 parliamentary elections, particularly if reformists gain control of the Tehran municipal council. The results of the Tehran elections may also provide a rough reflection of President Ahmadinejad's current popularity in the capital city. It will also be significant to see the extent of meddling in the elections by IRGC, Basij, or others. Some contacts allege the IRGC is divided in support between Ahmadinejad and Qalibaf. If true, it will be interesting to see in whose favor any meddling will be.

BURNS